LSU Press Specializes In Regional Works of High Quality

By Ed St. Louis

The Louisiana State University Press was established as a separate publishing division of the University in August 1935 under Dr. Marcus Wilkerson, who served as director until his death in 1953. In 1954 Donald Ellegood, the present director, filled the position formerly occupied by Dr. Wilkerson.

The LSU Press has gained a national reputation for the consistently high quality of its publications since "Louisiana Place-Names of Indian Origin" by William A. Read, the first book to bear the University Press imprint.

The Press, formerly located on the second floor of Alumni Hall, now in the Hill Memorial Building, recognizes in its publishing program two primary obligations: (1) to record permanently the results of research and scholarship for the benefit of other scholars, and (2) to publish readable, authentic interpretation of such scholarship for the interested layman.

Regional Emphasis

As a rule the press does not print original fiction, poetry, or drama. Through its strong emphasis on regional publishing, the Press has tried to preserve in part and to interpret Louisiana's and the South's own heritage of history, law, politics, literature and folklore, art and culture.

An extensive list of books dealing with Southern history, including two of its most successful series, has been published: the widely acclaimed, ten-volume "History of the South," seven volumes of which have so far appeared, and the "Southern Biography Series," fifteen volumes of which have been issued.

Nearly half of all the books published by the Press have been authored by members of the University faculty—probably the highest ratio of publications by faculty of the parent institution for any university press in the country, and a concrete indication of the great amount of productive scholarship taking place within the University. Since July 1954 the press has published 80 new books. Thirty-five of these are by members of the LSU faculty; 5 are by resident Louisianans; and 21 others are by Southerners.

Distribution Improved

Under the direction of Mr. Ellegood channels for distribution of Press books have been greatly improved. In the United States a permanent staff of eight commission salesmen call on all major bookstores and libraries twice each year. Outside the country, three separate sales agencies distribute the books in Canada, Great Britain and Europe, Latin and South America, the Orient, India, Australia, and the Philippines.

Evidence of the consistently high quality of Press publications is reflected in the following awards: The Herbert Baxter Adams Award by the American Historical Assn. for "the best book in European history during 1953-55"; the Research Award by the National Journalism Society for "outstanding scholarly research in the fields of journalism and mass communications" in 1954; the Sydnor Memorial Award by the Southern Historical Assn. for "the best book in Southern history during 1954-56"; the Louisiana Literary Award for 1955 and 1958; the Sidney Hillman prize for "the best book in the fields of civil rights and civil liberties in 1956"; and the selection of ten other titles from 1955-58 as "Southern books of the year".

Press books have been translated into Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, German, French and Italian.

Since the establishment of the Press, about 300 books have been published.

Two-thirds In Print

The edition size for Press publications usually ranges from 800 to 5,000 copies. On an average, about two to three hundred of these will be sold to libraries, five or six hundred to scholars, and one to four thousand to laymen. "Trade books", those of general interest, are distributed through regular retail bookstores and through export firms to most foreign countries. All publications are kept in print as long as any demand exists; about two thirds of the entire backlist is still in print today.

Some of the more recent publications are:

"The Supreme Court from Taft to Warren" by Alpheus Thomas Mason: "The Building of TVA", an illustrated history by John Hamilton Kyle; "Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy" on guerrilla warfare in the West, 1861-1865 by Richard S. Brownlee; "The Rudolph Matas History of Medicine in Louisiana", volume 1 by John Duffy; "Reluctant Rebel; The Secret Diary of Robert Patrick" by F. Jay Taylor; and "Louisiana: The Pelican State" by Edwin Adams Davis.

Mr. Ellegood explained that "having the advantage of a productive home faculty and a sound back-list, the Press can rightly expect continued development in coming years."